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## **What are the common causes of poor digestion?**

Some of the reasons we don't digest our food efficiently are habits and lifestyle, such as: eating whilst we are doing other things like working, eating too fast, not chewing the food properly, exercising too quickly after a meal, not drinking enough water, poor dietary choices and food combinations – there are lots of ways we can easily put a strain on the digestive system without really trying too hard!

Physiologically there are also a number of reasons we might be struggling to digest our food.

In some people not enough stomach acid is produced. We are all aware of “problems with acid” and people tend to think more commonly of too much acid being produced rather than too little.

The stomach is the key place for protein digestion and if there is not enough hydrochloric acid produced by the stomach, the protein cannot be digested properly. The first stage of releasing stomach acid is by the release of a hormone Gastrin which is secreted in response to being hungry and thinking about food. This is one reason why being too busy to eat can have an impact on your digestive function. Once we start to eat and chew the food, the chewing process continues the process of stimulating the release of the stomach acid.. The main enzyme which breaks down protein is called pepsin and it needs to stomach acid levels to be adequate in order for it to be produced.

In addition to assisting protein digestion, the acid protects us from bacteria and parasites.

Low levels of stomach acid are a common problem which contributes to poor digestive function.

## **What causes Low Stomach Acid?**

There are various reasons why some people may not produce stomach acid efficiently:

1. Helicobacter Pylori infection suppresses stomach acid production
2. Eating a bad diet with devitalised foods may have deprived the body of the building blocks it needs to produce enzymes efficiently
3. Excess dietary fat and sugar may inhibit acid production
4. Low adrenal or thyroid function can cause a deficiency of stomach acid
5. Stress inhibits the neuro-hormonal mechanisms necessary for normal stomach acid production; it also weakens the adrenal glands
6. Diets with restricted salt intake may contribute to low stomach acid

## **What are the symptoms of Low Stomach Acid?**

- Heartburn (more commonly associated with excess acid, but, if there is not enough acid, the food sits too long in the stomach and this causes inflammation and irritation to the stomach wall).
- Indigestion
- Upper abdominal bloating
- Heaviness in the stomach area
- Food “sitting like a stone” in the stomach
- Hungrier after eating than before
- Belching after eating
- Trapped wind
- Chronic constipation
- Undigested foods in stools
- Coated tongue
- Bad breath
- Nausea after taking supplements

## **Symptoms which may indicate Low Stomach Acid and are not associated with the digestive tract**

- Multiple food allergies
- Itching around the rectum
- Weak, peeling and cracked fingernails
- Iron Deficiency
- Chronic Candida infections
- Dilated blood vessels in the cheeks and nose
- Chronic intestinal parasites or abnormal flora
- Adult Acne
- Arthritis
- Muscle Cramps
- Fatigue
- Weak peeling / cracked nails
- Leaky Gut
- Toxic bowel

## **Diseases with which Low Stomach Acid is commonly associated**

- Osteoporosis
- Addison's Disease
- Asthma
- Celiac Disease
- Dermatitis
- Eczema
- Gallstones
- Chronic Hives
- Pernicious Anaemia (consequence of B12 Deficiency)
- Psoriasis
- Rosacea
- Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Thyroid Disorders

## **How can you Test for Low Stomach Acid**

To help identify if you have too little stomach acid the following steps may be useful:

### **Bicarbonate of Soda Test**

(If you suspect too little stomach acid)

Use one level teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda dissolved in water and drink it on an empty stomach.

- If you have adequate stomach acid, the bicarbonate of soda will be converted into gas and produce bloating and belching within five to ten minutes. (Just drink more water to dilute and minimise the effects of the bicarbonate of soda.)
- If you do not have any effect, you are likely to be suffering from low stomach acid.

### **Lemon Juice Test**

(If you suspect too much stomach acid – 'heart burn')

Take one tablespoon of lemon juice when suffering from heartburn.

- If this helps your symptoms, this is an indication your stomach acid is too low.
- If symptoms worsen, this indicates you have too much stomach acid.

## **What are the other causes of Poor Digestive Function?**

As far as the digestive system goes, the stomach and stomach acid is not the whole story. Once the food enters the small intestine, it relies upon not only its own enzymes, but enzymes produced by the pancreas and bile from the liver to complete the digestive process. So the health of the liver and pancreas are also important in maintaining a healthy digestive process.

Symptoms of deficient enzymes in the small intestine can include bloating, greasy fatty stools, diarrhea, undigested foods in the stool, acne, allergies and hypoglycemic symptoms.

## **How can I find out what the problem is with my Digestive system?**

The best way of establishing what is happening in your digestive system is to send a stool sample to the lab for a Comprehensive Stool Analysis. This test looks at the levels of the enzymes as well as testing the levels of healthy bacteria and pathogens, presence of parasites and moulds.

*As with all health issues, if you are experiencing symptoms you are concerned about, you should always seek the advice of your Doctor.*